A

LETTER

Concerning the present State

OF

RELIGION

AMONGST US.

This is a Popish Pamphlet, to seduce poor people. Anno. 1656.

BIBLIOTHECA BRITANNICA

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A Letter concerning the present State of Religion amongst us.

MY dear Brother in Christ, no lesse then by birth; I have perused the Ordinance for ejecting of Scandalous Ministers, and finding it likely enough to send you a Pastor, that shall have have no authority from the Church, have thought it necessary for me, to give you the reasons of that opinion which I declared unto you, that in that case, you ought not in conscience to acknowledge such a for one your Pastor, by going to hear him preach, and seeming to joyn in his Prayers, much lesse to receive the Eucharist at his hands, if such a one shall be so audacious as to celebrate it.

This that I may do, I must first propose the Case, as it is stated by those Acts which pretend to settle Religion among us. For, first, the Act whereby the present Government is established, declareth, that the *Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures shall be held forth, as the publick profession of these Nations*; And that, *such as professe Faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing from this profession, in doctrine, worship, or discipline,* shal be protected in the exercise of their Religion, excepting Popery and Prelacy, and those who under the profession of Christ, hold forth, and practise licentiousnesse. In prosecution hereof an Ordinance is issued

forth, giving commission to certain persons, named in it, to examine and try all that have come into possession of Churches since *April.* 13. 1653. all that have augmentations from Parliament, all that shall pretend to come into Churches that shall be void, whether fit for the Office and Benefice, by no other Rule, then the Certificate of three godly Neighbours, (one at least a Minister) concerning their conversation in godlinesse upon their own knowledge, and the judgement of five Commissioners, that the grace of God is in their hearts, and that they are fit to preach. In further prosecution hereof, issues forth this Ordinance, whereby, no man is made scandalous for his judgement, but he that is liable to the Act against Blasphemy of *Aug.* 9. 1653. And with him is ranked, he, who shall frequently and publickly have read the Service since Christmasse 1653. whereby it appeareth, that those who have declared their perseverance in the Religion which they have hitherto professed, by reading the Service, are therefore counted scandalous; But those that can obtain the certificate of such men as these Triers count godly men, together with their own opinion, that so they are, and fit to Preach, are thereby qualified in Law, to be Pastors of Parishes: And consequently to succeed those that adhere to the Christianity which hitherto they have professed, being cast out by the Commissioners for ejecting of scandalous Ministers.

In the first place then, I say, that the effect of these Laws is, to nullifie, and make void one Article of the Creed, which hitherto we professe; To wit, the belief of one holy Catholick and Aposto-

dick Church. This word Church may signifie two things. First, onely the whole number of Christians; Secondly, a Communion and corporation of those that professe true Christianity, founded by the will of God, and the ministery of our Lord Christ, and his Apostles. That Christians, when they professe to beleeve the Catholick Church, do not mean, that they beleeve that there is in the world a number of men that professe to be Christians, it is manifest, because all Christians hope to be saved by their Faith: but they cannot hope to be saved, by beleeving that which they see; Now all men see, that there is such a company of men in the world: therefore when they say, they beleeve the Catholick Church, as part of that Faith, whereby they hope to be saved, they do not professe to beleeve that there is such a company of men, but that there is a Corporation of true Christians, founded by our Lord Christ and his Apostles, which Hereticks and Schismaticks cannot have Communion with, and that they hope to be saved by this Faith, as being members of it. And this is that, which the stile of the holy Catholick and Apostlick Church signifies, as distinguishing the Body of true Christians, (to wit, so far as profession goes) from the Conventicles of Hereticks and Schismaticks. For this title of Catholick would signifie nothing, if Hereticks and Schismaticks were not barred the Communion of the Church. And let no man imagine, that the Schisme which the Reformation hath made between us and the Church of Rome, hath dissolved the obligation of being members of the Church: if that change which is called Refor-

mation, preſerve not ſuch a Church, as ought to be acknowledged for a true member of the whole, or Catholick Church, it is no Reformation, but the deſtruction of Chriſtianity. Now when theſe Laws inable Souldiers, and Juſtices of the Peace, as well as thoſe that call themſelves Miniſters, to make publick Preachers; as well ſuch as have received no Ordination from the Church, as thoſe that have; It is manifeſt, that all difference between Clergy and People, is by them diſſolved, and made void; And by conſequence, the Corporation of the Church, which grounds and creates all the difference, which hitherto by all Chriſtians hath been received, between theſe two qualities. True it is, that for the preſent, as well thoſe who have lawful authority to officiate the publick Service of God by Ordination from the Church, are admitted or maintained in their Benefices by theſe Laws, as thoſe that have none; Though it be wel enough known, that thoſe who have ſuch authority do pretend to act by vertue of it, and not by this Law, further then, as by ſubmitting to it, they remove that force, which hinders their right, otherwiſe gotten, to take effect. But it is as true, that ſuppoſing this Law to continue an age, none ſuch can remain. And when none ſuch remains, then there ſhall be no Church in *England*, but by equivocation of words, if the premiſes be be true. And therefore, thoſe that acknowledge ſuch as have no other authority but from this power, for their Paſtors, cannot conſequently profeſſe to beleeve one Catholick Church, nor hope for ſalvation by being members of it. For ſuppoſing for the preſent, though not granting, that the power which makes theſe Laws is from God, yet can it not be

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pretended to be from our Lord Christ and his Apostles. And therefore this authority derived from it, cannot be derived from any act of theirs constituting the Church, and inabling it to give this authority, by acknowledging whereof, Christians presume that they are members of the Church.

Now that you may see why the belief of Christs Church is an Article of our Creed; I say further, that you cannot acknowledg such men for your Pastors, because you are not secured by these Laws, that they are not Hereticks. For, seeing the Act of Establishment pretends onely to *hold forth the Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures*, and that all the Heresies that are this day in the world, do maintain themselves to professe the Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures, it is manifest, that these Laws provide not, that they shall not be Hereticks, which are sent you for Pastors. Here I must not complain, that, whereas all that professe Faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing from the profession held forth, are protected in the exercise of their Religion, Popery and Prælacy are excepted; though it cannot be denied, that both profess Faith in God by Jesus Christ. Nor, that, those who hold the profession established by the Laws under which we were born, are refused that protection, which is tendred Socinians, enemies of the Trinity and satisfaction of Christ, who manifestly profess Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures, and Faith in God by Jesus Christ. For, my business is not to say, what they that made these Lawes, should have done by them; but, what you are to do now they are made. But, if it be answered, that,

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those that make these Lawes, repose trust in them to whom they grant these Commissions, that they will not take any to be godly men that are Hereticks; To this I say, that will not serve your turn for several reasons. For, those that professe all that the Law requires them to professe, that is, *Faith in God through Jesus Christ*, and the *Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures*, cannot be judged ungodly for whatsoever they professe besides, by any Power derived from this Law, but by an arbitrary power to be exercised at the will of the Commissioners. And, how are you assured that no Heretick shall obtain a certificate of three Neighbours, and so answer their demands, that they shall have cause to think him in Gods grace? However; you are not warranted to trust your salvation, and the salvation of those that depend on you, either upon the judgement of these Commissioners, or of them that make the laws. If it be demanded, why the secular Power, and the Commissioners thereof are not as well to be trusted with the salvation of the people, as those that may pretend authority from the Church? the answer is ready: That, when you acknowledge a Pastor sent by the Church, you neither trust his person, nor the person of him that sends him, but the Laws which the Church hath received from our Lord and his Apostles: in as much as, by professing Christianity so limited, and according to them to exercise the function which he receiveth, he becomes qualified for the charge in which you acknowledge him: which Laws he that destroyes, by dissolving the Corporation of the Church, destroyes the trust you are to have in those whom you

you acknowledge your Pastors, that they are not Hereticks.

And here I must not fail to give you notice, that those Presbyterians and Independents, who, having departed from the Church of *England*, upon pretence of erecting Presbyteries and Congregations, do now make themselves Commissioners to execute these Laws, which destroy both Presbyteries and Congregations; have thereby destroyed the ground of all trust which the Church might have had in them, for conduct in Christianity. For what profession can it be presumed that they will hold, when they hold not that, for which they have destroyed the Unity of the Church? which is the reason, why Hereticks and Schismaticks, though they may be re-admitted to the Communion of the Church upon repentance, yet, by the Rules of the Catholick Church cannot be re-admitted to be of the Clergie. These Apostacies having made them uncapable of that trust, which the Church must necessarily repose in the Clergy.

That you may see this is not for nothing, I say further, that there is among us a damnable Heresy of Antinomians, or Libertines, formerly, when Puritans were not divided from the Church of *England*, known by the name of Grindletonians and Etonists. These, do beleeve so to be saved by the free grace of God, by which Christ died for the Elect, that true faith is nothing but the revelation hereof, and by consequence, that all their sins, past, present, and to come, being remitted by this grace; to repent of sin, or to contend against it, is the renouncing of Gods free grace, and saving faith.

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Another opinion there is, which I cannot say the Presbyterians hold, or require to be held; but in regard their confession of Faith, and Catechisme disclaimes it not, and therefore allows them that hold it to be of their Faction, may well be said to maintain it; That, for a man to beleeve that he is prædestinate to life, and that Christ died for him, is that faith, which alone justifieth a Christian. Whether of these opinions is the better, or the worse, or, what is the difference between them, let the parties dispute. This I say, that, allowing the merits and satisfaction of Christ to the Elect for remission of sins, and a title to everlasting life, in no consideration, but of their persons, it is more reasonable to say, that they can never become guilty of sin, then, that the remission of their sins, and their right to life, should depend upon the knowledge of their prædestination revealed by Faith: seeing nothing is true because it is beleeved, but beleeved because it is true. And therefore, I say, that both of these opinions are destructive to the foundation of faith which the Church of *England* teacheth, when, in the Office of Baptisme, and the beginning of the Catechisme, it requireth all that are baptized, not onely to profess the Faith of Christ, *but to renounce the flesh, the world, and the devil, and to fight with them till death, for the keeping of Gods Commandments, assuring them hereupon, that they are regenerate and adopted Gods children by his Grace in Christ.* For he that is saved by undertaking and persevering in this, cannot be saved by beleeving, that he is absolutely predestinate to life without it. For, I must say, that it is one thing to be absolutely predestinate to life;

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another thing to be predeſtinate to life, by being abſolutely predeſtinate to perſevere till death. For he that is predeſtinate to life, by being abſolutely predeſtinate to perſevere in the Covenant of Grace till death, is predeſtinate to life in conſideration of the Covenant of Grace, in which he is predeſtinate to perſevere. And whether a man can be abſolutely predeſtinate to perſevere in it, of his own free-will, and voluntary choice, or not, is that which remaines in diſpute among Divines, which I ſuppoſe not here, to be either true or falſe. But to ſay, that a man is abſolutely predeſtinate to life, and to ſay, that he is predeſtinate to life, in conſideration of his undertaking and perſevering in the Covenant of Grace, which muſt be the act of his own free-will and choice, is to ſay expreſs contradictions, and to deſtroy the Covenant of Grace, (into which, by the Baptiſme of the Church of *England*, every man entreth) and all hope of Salvation, which is meerly imaginary, if not grounded upon it. Seeing then, that the trial upon which theſe Commiſſioners proceed, is, the marks of predeſtination, whether true or falſe, not diſtinguiſhing whether they ſuppoſe the Covenant of Grace, the undertaking of it, and perſevering in it, or not; I ſay, that you are no way ſecured by theſe Laws, that the Triers themſelves, much leſſe thoſe whom they ſhall ſend you, are not complices of this damnable Hereſy.

I muſt not forget to adviſe you, that *Dell*, one ſo far of this Hereſy, that he hath written a Book againſt Baptiſme it ſelf, is now, and is acknowledged by theſe Commiſſioners, maſter of a Colledge in the Univer-

Universlity, (whereof several fellows have been notorious Preachers of this Heresy) who cannot be acknowledged a member of the Church by any good Christian.

The like I alledge in regard of the Sect of the Anabaptists. In which point I must suppose two things. First, that the Christian Faith supposeth Original sin. Secondly, that without Baptisme there is no cure for it; which depends upon the Premises, that there is no absolute predestination, without consideration of the Covenant of Grace, which Baptisme executeth, to cure it. For, whatsoever our Lord meant, when he said, *unlesse ye be born again of water*— it is manifest, that, though no man can become a true Christian, without the operation of the Holy Ghost, yet the Grace of the Holy Ghost dwelling in a man, is not granted, but, in consideration of his entring into the said covenant, and that this onely is the cure of Original sin. There is then no necessity of shewing an expresse precept in Scripturre, that all Infants be baptized: or that the Church from the Apostles time did Baptize all while they were Infants. If the Christian Faith suppose Original sin, if no cure for that, but by the covenant of Grace, if no execution of that Covenant, but the Baptisme of the Church, (unlesse, where the outward act is prevented by inevitable necessity, after the inward desire thereof was sufficiently resolved and declared) then is this necessity a constraining precept, and hath been so reputed by the Church, even since the Apostles; which alwayes hath taken order, not that all should be baptized Infants, but that no Infant

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ſhould die without being baptized. For, the diligent watch over all occaſions, that might carry Infants out of the world unbaptized, obſerved by the Church from the beginning, though neglected ſince, demonſtrateth, no legal aſſurance of the ſalvation of ſuch as ſhould die unbaptized, whatſoever might be preſumed of Gods goodneſſe over and above what he declareth. But, as for thoſe that ſhall become obliged and engaged to the covenant of grace, by being conſecrated to God through the act of the Church, thereby obliging it ſelf to ſhew them the truth of Chriſtianity, which obligeth all to whom it is ſhown; the neceſſity aforeſaid, together with the practice of the Church, is a legal preſumption, of the cure of Original ſin, and the opening of Paradiſe, which it onely ſhutteth. If therefore our Anabaptiſts do not believe original ſin, they are Pelagian Hereticks. If, beleeving it, they beleeve notwithſtanding, that it is cured by Predeſtination without the Covenant of Grace, they fall into the damnable Hereſy premiſed: And ſeem to make, not onely that Baptiſme whereby they make void the Baptiſme received in the Church of *England*, a renouncing of the Chriſtianity which they received and profeſſed at their Baptiſme; but, that alſo, which they give thoſe whom they will not have baptized while they are infants, utterly void, and ineffectual towards God, as not pretending to bring them into Covenant of Gods Grace by Chriſt, that is, into the profeſſion of the true Faith, and of fighting againſt ſin till death, under the ſame: which, they that beleeve Salvation by Gods Predeſtination revealed by faith, without undertaking and perſe-

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vering in the Covenant of Grace, can by no means pretend to do. Seeing then, that the neceſſity of Baptiſme cannot be denied, but upon ſuch a ground, as voideth the Covenant of Grace, and ſeeing the Triers are either Anabaptiſts themſelves, or complices in the ſame Commiſſion with Anabaptiſts (whereof there are in the Commiſſion of Triers, five or ſix that I hear of by name, and how many more God knows, and in the Commiſſion for ejecting of ſcandalous Miniſters, in one County of Hertford, nine of fifteen, as I am credibly informed) it is evident, that, by theſe Laws, you are no wayes ſecured of having Anabaptiſts for your Paſtors, who are expreſsly Schiſmaticks (forſaking the Church for that which the Church alwayes did), and, by conſequence of the premiſed reaſons, Hereticks.

As the Baptiſme of thoſe men whom they pretend to ſend you for Paſtors, is, by this reaſon, void in point of right, ſo the Euchariſt which they may pretend to celebrate, will be void of the effect of a Sacrament toward you, but not void of the crime of Sacriledge towards God. The reaſons are two. The firſt, becauſe thoſe who have not received the Order of Prieſthood ſhall pretend to celebrate it. For, the Scripture, interpreted by the un-interrupted practiſe of the Church, allows no man, under the Order of a Prieſt, to celebrate the Euchariſt. Not, as if thoſe who call themſelves Miniſters did commit this Sacriledge, in conſecrating the Euchariſt: Though the name of Miniſters ſignifies no more then deacons, and, that it is truely

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Sacrilege for deacons to celebrate the Euchariſt: But, becauſe thoſe whom the Church lawfully gives not the power of celebrating this Sacrament to, (though, by miſ-underſtanding, thoſe whom it gives it to, may be called Miniſters, and ought to be called Prieſts) their Euchariſt is no Sacrament, but Sacrilege. The ſecond, becauſe they know not, nor acknowledge, the Conſecration, that is requiſite to the celebration and beeing of this Sacrament, by the ſame Scriptures, underſtood according to the un-interrupted cuſtome and practice of the Church. For, the whole Church of God, allowing the elements conſecrated to be the Body and Bloud of Chriſt myſtically, or in the Sacrament, alloweth this change to be made by the conſecration, before which they were onely Bread and Wine. Not, as if after the Conſecration they were not ſo, but becauſe they are then become that which they were not afore, to wit, the Sacrament of Chriſts Body and Bloud, or the Body and Bloud of Chriſt ſpiritually, and myſtically, that is, in the Sacrament. This Conſecration being exactly maintained by the Church of *England*, they that preſume to celebrate the Euchariſt, without acknowledging the ſame, and pretending to deſtroy the Law by which it is exerciſed, muſt be preſumed, not to acknowledge the neceſſity thereof, to the being of this Sacrament. And therefore, they, and their complices in the Communion thereof, to be guilty of the Body and Blood of Chriſt, as not diſtinguiſhing a ſigne of mans inſtitution from a Sacrament of Gods appointment and Ordinance.

As for the Office of Preaching and Praying, which they pretend to, in behalf of the Church, I will mark you out two monstrous Impostures, in all the Sects of this time. The first is this ground of the blessed Reformation of Religion in *England*; That the Church is not to assemble for the Service of God, but when there is preaching. This seems to stand upon a very grosse mistake, of those passages of the Apostles writings, which declare, the necessary means of salvation to consist, in hearing the Gospel preached; As if they were meant of Sermons in the Pulpit, which are onely made to those that are already Christians, not of publishing the Gospel to those that knew it not afore, convincing them that it is true, and instructing them wherein it consists. Or, as if those that are already Christians wanted any thing necessary to Salvation, supposing them to persevere in the Christianity which they have professed. Not as if their Christianity did not oblige them to hear Sermons, when the authority of the Church assures them to be without offence; But, because, the Offices of publick Praiers, and the Praises of God, especially in celebrating the blessed Eucharist, are the end of all that instruction in Christianity, which Christians receive from the Church; and therefore, all Preaching subordinate to the same, as the means to the End: And because, they may be daily so frequented, without offence, and to the increase of the reverence of Christianity, as the experience of our time shows, that Preaching cannot be. The second is, that, the first day of the week, called Sunday, is the Sabbath, by force of

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the fourth Commandement. An Impoſture ſo groſs, that it may well ſerve for an inſtance, what Faction can do, with men that are ſober otherwiſe. That God, by commanding the Jews to keep the ſeventh day of the week, to wit, that day on which he ended the Creation of the world, and, for that very reaſon commanding it, ſhould be thought to command Chriſtians to keep the firſt day of the week, on which he began the Creation, and our Lord Chriſt aroſe from the dead; That is, that the ſame words of the ſame Commandment in writing, ſhould oblige Jews to reſt on the Saturday, which oblige Chriſtians to reſt on the Sunday, is a thing, which when this fit of frenſy ſhall be paſt us, will ſcarſe be beleeved, that ever any man would beleeve. True it is, this firſt day hath been obſerved, in, and ever ſince the Apoſtles time, but not by vertue of that Law, which their office was to declare was expired, and out of date; but, by the Act of their own authority, whereby they gave Laws to Chriſts Church. Let us now onely compare the daily morning and evening Sacrifice of Prayer and the Praiſes of God, eſtabliſhed by the Order of the Church of *England*, together with the more ſolemn ſervice of Lords dayes and Feſtivals, with a bare Sermon upon Sundaies, uſhered in and out with a Prayer of every mans own conceit, (ſetting aſide the Hereſy and falſe doctrine, the Faction & Schiſm, the blaſphemy and ſlander, the ridiculous follies which this Sermon and Prayer may, and which we have known them contain) I ſay, comparing theſe together, the bleſſed reformation pretended, is and ought to be accounted, the abomination of deſolation, in compariſon of that Order which it deſtroyeth

ſtroyeth. And therefore upon this account alone, thoſe, who, not being inveſted with that ordinary Power by which the Church is inabled to correct abuſes in the Church, ſhall uſurp the Power of the Church to introduce this diſorder, are thereby Schiſmaticks themſelves, and thoſe that acknowledge them for their Paſtors, complices of Schiſmaticks.

It will be ſaid, that theſe Laws will be amended, as it was many times ſaid awhile ſince, that the Parliament would ſettle a Miniſtery. To this I ſay, that thoſe that are ſent you by virtue of theſe Laws, have every way as good authority, as any, the Power that made theſe Laws, joyned with a Parliament can give to them, that are not otherwiſe qualified by the authority of the Church. That is, that this Power of a Parliament together, though, adviſing with divines, how the qualities of thoſe whom they make Miniſters are to be limited, can do no more, then this Power, with adviſe of thoſe Divines it uſeth, hath done: Both being Secular, and able to make men their Miniſters, to maintain the Intereſt of that Government which their Power conſtituteth, but not Miniſters of the Church, to maintain the intereſt of that Faith, and ſervice of God, which it is truſted with. If it be ſaid, that, at the Reformation, thoſe from whom the Miniſtry is propagated, had not received by their Ordination, Power to ordain others; I anſwer, that, it is agreed among all that profeſſe the Reformation, that the abuſes crept into the Church were ſo great, that particular Churches, that is, part of the whole, might,

might, and ought to reform themſelves, without conſent or concurrence of the whole: It is alſo agreed among them that maintain it, that, there is in the Church a ſucceſſion of perſons, indued with authority in behalf of it, as well as of doctrine, and of the ſervice of God; Though the ſucceſſion of perſons be of leſs conſideration, as ſubordinate to the ſucceſſion of doctrine, as the means to the end. In this caſe then I ſay, that, ſuch inabilities, in perſons veſted with Eccleſiaſtical Power by the Reformation, as became unavoidable by the refuſal of the reſt of the Church to concur in it, cannot make Churches ſo conſtituted, no Churches, nor void the effect of thoſe Offices which perſons ſo qualified ſhall miniſter unto Gods people. But, ſuch inabilities, as became unavoidable, onely for want of due information in thoſe that undertook to reform themſelves, as it would be malice in man to juſtifie, ſo, it may reaſonably be preſumed, that the mercy of God excuſes. But ſuppoſing, according to the premiſes, and the ſenſe of all that adhere to the Church of *England*, that the Presbyterians Ordinations tend no more to maintain the primitive faith and ſervice of God, once delivered to the Church, and eſtabliſhed in it by the Apoſtles, then they do to maintain that which is hitherto eſtabliſhed in the Church of *England*; I ſay ſuppoſing this, to imagine, that an Aſſembly of Divines, by being lawfully ordained to the office of Prieſts or Deacons, according to the Laws of the Church of *England*, can by commiſſion from the ſecular Power, make ordinations, which the Laws under which they were ordained forbid, is to imagin,

that God can inable man to ſin, or, that a Soveraign Power can authorize the ſubject to rebell againſt it ſelf. And therefore, though the qualities of perſons to be ſent you for Paſtors may be otherwiſe limited by Acts which Parliaments may make, yet theſe qualities, (not being derived from the authority of the Apoſtles founding the Church, by any act of the Church, but from ſecular Power, and Commiſſion iſſued from it) make them no more Miniſters of the Church, that are made by Aſſemblies of Divines and Presbyteries, then thoſe that are made by commiſſion of Triers, and ejecting ſcandalous Miniſters: That is, both of them, being by their creation Schiſmaticks, and their profeſſion not clearing them of miſpriſion of Hereſy, they can no more be acknowledged by thoſe that pretend to adhere to the Church of *England*, then Belial by Chriſt, or darkneſſe by light.

Hereby then you may conclude how to receive thoſe, whom the Presbyterians may ſend you for Paſtors, by any change in the ſecular Power. For I charge not them, that they do not beleeve the Church: which they would be themſelves. I acknowledge that they ſecure you from all Sects but themſelves. But in as much as they maintain Prædeſtination to life, onely in conſideration of what Chriſt hath already done or ſuffered for the Elect; in ſo much, I ſay, that they do not, nor can Baptize into the Croſs of Chriſt; that is to ſay, into the hope of Salvation, in conſideration of fighting againſt the fleſh, the world, and the Devil, for the keeping of Gods commandements, under the profeſſion of the Chriſtian Faith. For, that which is abſo-

absolutely due, as salvation is due to the elect by the gift of Gods Prædestination, cannot be burthened with any condition of Christianity afterwards. And therefore that Baptisme is no effectual Baptisme before God, (if Baptisme received in the Chuch of *England* be such) that is to say, it is no Baptisme, but by Equivocation of words, in as much as, the obligation of a mans Christianity is not declared, or understood, to take hold of him, by vertue of it. For seeing the hope of salvation which Christians have by their Baptisme is grounded npon the condition of their Christianity, that Baptisme which promiseth salvation without providing for this condition, is no Baptisme, but by equivocation of words. I say further, that the change, which they call Reformation, visibly tends, to introduce that monstrous imposture of two Sermons every Sabbath, in stead of the daily and ordinary service of God, (together with the more solemn service of God upon Festivals and Lords daies, and other extraordinary occasions) which the Church of *England*, with the whole Church of God from the beginning hath maintained, so far, as there was means to maintain it. I will not here insist upon the order of Bishops, and their chief power in their Dioceses, as of Divine Right, that is, instituted and introduced by the Apostles. Let The Presbyterians think themselves priviledged to erect altar against Altar, upon so desperate a Plea, as now they insist upon, that the Presbyteries are rather of divine right, then the chief Power of Bishops, in their Dioceses; I insist now onely, that this Power of the Bishops, was not against Gods Law; which every man must grant me, that acknowledges a Church in

from the Reformation till now. In this case, they, who, to introduce this Christianity, and this publick exercise of it, transgressing that authority to which they were called by the visible act of the Church of *England*, take upon them, to share that Power from which they had their authority, among themselves, and, to execute it by consent among themselves, in their several precincts, cannot be said to constitute a Church, by vertue of any act of the Apostles, or any authority derived from such act, but by vertue of their own act, as all Apostates and usurpers do; That is to say, that, they do not constitute such a Church, by being a member whereof a man may reasonably assure himself of salvation, upon any principle of Christianity, but such a Church, as is indeed no Church, unless it be by equivocation of termes, but a conventicle of Schismaticks with misprision of the Heresy aforesaid. And therefore their Priesthood is no Priesthood, their Eucharist is no Eucharist, (unless it by equivocation of words) but Sacrilege against Gods Ordinance. Besides, that, what is requisite to the consecration thereof, or, wherein it consists, they seem to be as secure of, and as little to regard; as the most ignorant of those sects into which the once common name of Puritans stands divided at this time. Neither is it in any secular Power, though never so unquestionable, to cure these nullities and incapacities, in the pretense, upon which they take upon them to be a Church; Though for the present they are not so much as authorized to the world, by any priviledge or penalty enacted by any secular Power, but onely protected by it.

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That all the world may see, that there is nothing but their own usurpation, and the consent of those whom they have debauched to their Schisme, whereby they subsist as a Church: And, that they will, by vertue of their Original, be as malignant to any secular Power, that shall not maintain and authorize them, as ever they were to that which they have destroyed, to introduce this shadow of a Church.

If it be objected, that your Estates will be liable to Penalties, that may be enacted against those that withdraw from the exercise of the Religion publickly held forth; To this I have no answer, but, that wee are to obey God rather then man, to prefer the next world before this, and to bear Christs Crosse, if we expect his kingdom. Onely thus much I must observe, that these Laws proceed from a profession, that it is not lawful to force mens Consciences, in matter of religion, by penalties. And therefore, though the Prælatical party are not protected in the exercise of their Religion, yet cannot they be punished for it, but by denying that which is declared upon the publick Faith. Besides, acknowledging *the Christian Religion contained in the Scriptures*, and *professing faith in God, by Jesus Christ*, they are as much qualified for protection, as those that are protected by the act of establishment. And, not to allow the exercise of that Religion, the profession whereof is not disallowed, seems to bee, to forbid men to be Christians who are not forbidden to be such Christians, and to expose them to popular tumult, contrary to the publick

lick peace, whom no Law puniſhes. If the Papiſts continue nevertheleſſe liable to former Penalties, perhaps it is becauſe they are reputed Idolaters. But becauſe theſe laws, and the profeſſion from whence they proceed, may change, I muſt confeſſe, you cannot follow my advice, but that your eſtate may become queſtionable: Neither would I give it, could I aſſure you of the kingdom of heaven otherwiſe.

If you demand what means I can ſhew you to exerciſe your Religion, withdrawing from the means which theſe Acts provide: I anſwer, that there are hitherto, every where, of the Clergie, that adhere to the Church, who will finde it their duty, to ſee your infants Chriſtned, your children Catechiſed, the Euchariſt communicated to all thar ſhall withdraw from Churches forcibly poſſeſſed by them whom you own not for Paſtors. And if they cannot continually miniſter to you, ſo diſperſed, the ordinary Offices of Gods ſervice; you have the Service of God according to the Order of the Church, you have the Scriptures to read for part of it, you have ſtore of Sermons manifeſtly allowed by the Church to read, you have Prayers preſcribed for all your own neceſſities and the neceſsities of the Church; To ſerve God with theſe in private, with ſuch as depend upon you, and are of the ſame judgement with you (leaving out what belongs to the Prieſts office to ſay) I do, to the beſt of my judgement, beleeve an acceptable ſacrifice to God, which you

cannot

cannot offer at the Church in such case. And though I censure not my brethren of the Clergy, that think fit to comply with the power which we are under in holding or coming by their Benefices, (I suppose in respect of their flocks, rather then to their fruits) yet, if they beleeve themselves, and their flocks, to be members of Gods Church, by being members of the Church of *England*, they must needs beleeve, those flocks that acknowledge such Pastors, to be members of no Church, and therefore acknowledge you, and own your departure, and declare themselves to their own flocks, and instruct them to do the like, when the like case falls out: And so the refusing to hear the voice of strangers, will unite us to make a flock, under those whom we acknowledge our lawful Pastors.

I have found my self pressed, to Print Copies hereof, for mine own use, thereby to declare thus much of my judgement to you, and to the rest of my friends, because the consequence of owning such men for your Pastors, will be, to make us members of several Churches. Which must disable me, to do any office of a Clergy man towards you; unlesse it be the prosecuting of this, by shewing you further reasons, to justify what I say here, and to reduce you to it: Though it shall alwayes be my study, faithfully to serve my kinred and friends, in all Offices of civility. And I hope they will consider, what

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appearance there is that any thing ſhould move me, to make my ſelf liable to ſo much harm, as the publick declaring of this opinion will make me liable to, but the diſcharge of my conſcience to God and them, as the caſe ſhall require me to diſcharge it.

FINIS.